

ANTI-SLAVERY AGITATION

IN THE CHURCH

NOT AUTHORISED.

SPEECH

OF THE

REV. A. C. DICKERSON,

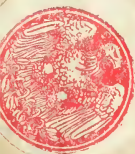
OF BOWLING GREEN, KY.,

the General Assembly, May 29th, 1857.

PHILADELPHIA:

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REV. MR. DICKERSON'S SPEECH

[IN THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY, MAY 29TH, 1857.]

MODERATOR:—We have reached a point in these discussions, when, it seems to me, we should pause and carefully review the ground we have travelled; and re-examine the principles on which we have proceeded. The circumstances, all seem to indicate an approximation of the “end.” I am, indeed, aware, that amid the precipitancy of revolutionary movements, men are little disposed to consider “first principles.” Especially is it distasteful to be stopped to examine the validity of our proceedings, when on the very point of gaining the *end* for which they were instituted. Yet as the bearings of what we now do, are likely to affect, very deeply, for weal or woe, a cause we all love, and wish above all things, to guard from injury; and as the very bonds of ecclesiastical brotherhood may be found sundered, amid the results of our action, with all the consequences of “schism” in the body, it surely is desirable and important, to the last degree, that we should be well assured that in seeking our ends, however good in themselves, we have incorporated in our work no *unsound* mate-

rial—adopted no principles of questionable propriety. Sir, our views are limited. Our powers are feeble. Yet the consequences of a single act are often momentous, and the immediate correction of an error, impracticable. We shall all be placed, in a short time, amid circumstances favorable to a full and correct apprehension of what we here do, and where it will be desirable, inexpressibly so, to find we had committed no mistake. With an appropriate reference to our *last account*, let us proceed to the work of investigation.

What sir, is the state of the matter to be discussed? Those who originated and have driven on this agitation, profess to regard the “system of American slavery (as a *political* institution,) an essentially unrighteous system—the great iniquity of the age—a violation of the most essential rights of man:”—that members of the Christian church, holding slaves under this system, are to some extent and in some way, *particeps criminis*, in this great wrong; that members of the Presbyterian church, who hold slaves, involve, in some way and to some extent, the entire body in the moral responsibilities of that wrong:—and that the General Assembly, as the highest Judicatory of the church, is the proper arena for discussion, and the legitimate tribunal for the proper action, to remove the evil. True, the agitators, in these

reform measures, have never accurately defined the *thing* complained of, nor definitely settled the mode or extent of the church's responsibility in the premises; nor marked out precisely the *remedy*. Yet the *animus* of the movement is plain enough. The *end* is the separation of all slaveholding from our denomination. The *means*, like the instrumentalities in most revolutionary movements, shape themselves according to the exigencies of the case. At first, FREE DISCUSSION was the means. This failing to meet the growing zeal of reformers, *remonstrance* and *reproof* were brought to its aid. These seeming to be equally unavailing, *disciplinary power* was inquired for, and, through the report of an able committee, *found*. And now *process* is directly proposed.

My general position, Moderator, is, That the subject of slavery—it being a political institution—lies WITHOUT the province of ecclesiastical supervision:—that the rights and immunities of membership, in the Presbyterian church, in *no way* and to *no degree*, depend upon the opinions or practice of individuals, in relation to slaveholding:—and that all agitation of this subject, in our General Assemblies is *illegitimate* to their proper functions:—and that this whole subject should, therefore, be totally ignored.

In support of this view, I shall now pro-

ceed to examine the subject:—1st. In its relations to our constitution. 2d. In reference to the teachings of the Bible. And 3d, in the light of the results, we have already reached.

1st. *The Constitution of our Church—its Relations to the Slavery Agitation.*

The *end* of the abolition movement is the separation of slaveholding from the church, on the ground that it is complicity with a *moral* wrong. The whole bearing of the agitation is then first to *impair* the good standing of slaveholding members, and second, to *expel* them, if the evil can be remedied by no milder measures. Now sir, to correctly apprehend the whole subject, we are led to enquire into the nature of our church constitution—its relations to the Bible—the *proper tenure* of church membership—the mode in which, and principles on which such ecclesiastical compacts are formed, and the functions of the General Assembly.

We have, sir, a written Constitution, comprising our doctrines, with their explication and application, as rules of life, in the larger and shorter Catechisms, our form of Government, and rules of Discipline. This book contains what we, as Presbyterians, believe the Bible to teach on these several topics. It is not the “rule of faith and practice” to us, as individual Christians. The *Bible* is

that rule. But it is the aggregate of our individual belief, as to what the Bible teaches. It is our *expressed interpretation* of the Bible as to the doctrines it teaches, and the form of ecclesiastical government and the principles of Discipline it inculcates. It is not indeed to supercede the Bible, or to be contemplated as in any degree above and beyond the Bible in point of authority; but is a summary of the Bible, as we understand it. All its authority rests in this, that it is, what we, as Presbyterians, hold the Scriptures to teach. Revert, sir, for a moment to the principles on which such ecclesiastical compacts are formed.

This book, in the preliminary principles, on which it confessedly rests, expressly recognizes the right of every individual to go directly, for himself, to the sacred Scriptures, for the doctrines he is to believe, and the principles of government and discipline he is to adopt. But Christians cannot fill their high mission, by separate and isolated action. How then is the desired combination to be effected?—either one man must think and determine for *all*, or those whose individual and independent examinations *harmonize*, must associate on the *basis* of that harmony. The former we all ignore, as the essence of despotism and at war with all just grounds of individual accountability. But

how is the latter to be effected? The results of free individual investigation must be *compared*; and their *agreement* made the *basis* of a *compact*.

Thus the Presbyterian church was formed. Its original members found, on comparing notes, that they had reached the same results, in their inquiries into the sacred Scriptures, as to doctrines to be believed, and the government and discipline to be adopted. They agreed to live together in ecclesiastical brotherhood, on this common interpretation of the Bible teaching. This common interpretation they wrote in a Book, and solemnly pledged themselves to abide by it; and to require all their successors both as members and officers of the church, to pledge themselves likewise as a condition of admittance.

But remembering the infirmities of our nature and the limited range of our powers, and the consequent possibility that subsequent inquiries might require different views of the Bible to be adopted, and a consequent modification of this book to be made; they incorporated a provision for such an emergency. This was exceedingly important. "Union is strength," was an axiom. From the unlicensed liberty of investigation, different discordant views were liable, at any time, to arise amid whose confictions, "unity" would be sacrificed. At the same time conscience

was not to be strained, nor liberty adjusted to a "procrustian bed." To meet both necessities in a happy and practical adjustment, it was incorporated, as an essential element, in the system, that when any individual should think he had discovered an error to be corrected, or a new doctrine, to be introduced, a memorial to that effect should be entertained by the Assembly and sent down to the Presbyteries, for their consideration; and if approved by a majority and in a given way attested, it should be incorporated accordingly.

This was manifestly a wise and just arrangement. Every individual has here the right to be heard and to have his views, when differing from the Constitution, fairly considered, as to their scriptural authority; while, at the same time, the general body is saved from all dangerous and hurtful obtrusion upon its harmony. If the individual cannot gain the convictions of the Body to *his* views, after reasonable opportunity, he must either adhere, holding his peculiarities in abeyance in deference to the general good; or if too vitally important, in his opinion, to be thus restrained; then by the terms of the compact, he must leave, and find a congenial field for their employment elsewhere: Now, sir, in view of these acknowledged principles, let it be observed,

that while each individual Christian has the right, and is in duty bound, to go directly to the Bible for the doctrines he is to believe, and the ecclesiastical government and discipline he is to adopt; and for these is responsible alone to the Lord of his conscience; yet as a *Presbyterian*, he is under solemn and binding vows to this Constitution. He becomes a Presbyterian on the ground that his interpretation of the Bible harmonises with that of *that* church; and in order to enjoy the advantages of *union*, he sought and obtained membership there.

Let it be also observed, that by the theory of the Presbyterian Constitution, the Presbyteries are the bodies authorized to alter the Constitution. All propositions for adding to, or taking from, or changing that ecclesiastical social compact, in any way or to any extent, must be submitted to them; and be sustained by a majority of them, before they can be the law of the church. This is a vital point. No opinions of any individual or bodies of individual Presbyterians—no resolutions of Synods or General Assemblies, can have any *force* as constitutional principles.

Let it be further observed, sir, that the tenure of the rights of membership in the Presbyterian church, is its *Constitution*, and that alone. We admit individuals to mem-

bership, upon their profession of faith in Christ and obedience to His laws. We admit them, as *Presbyterians*, upon their adoption of *our constitution*, as containing the correct interpretation of God's word, which is the only rule of faith and practice. When they enquire for the *terms* of admission, we present them our *Constitution*. *Here* and *here ONLY* are they to look for the *conditions* on which they are to be admitted; and for the *charter* of their rights and immunities when admitted. Here is the "social compact," ecclesiastical—the magna charta of the rights and liberties of the *Presbyterian* commonwealth. The doctrines he is to believe are *here*, and only *here*, recorded. The church government to which he subjects himself, and the system of discipline to which he promises submission, are *here* laid down. In the *judicial* decisions of the higher judicatories, he is to look for the decisions of doubtful or disputed points—and such decisions are the authoritative exponents of the Constitution. But the opinions and resolves of the higher judicatories *not judicial*, are no part of the Constitution—constitute no part of the *ground* of admission to membership, nor any test of character or standing. The higher judicatories have no authority to add any thing to the Constitution, nor to take any thing from it, nor to make any *new* tests

of Christian character or lay down any *new basis* of membership in the church. No doctrine, *beyond* those, declared in the Confession of Faith, can be made a doctrine of the Presbyterian church by any action of a General Assembly. Nor can any doctrine of the Confession, or claimed to be of it, be authoritatively declared or decided upon by a Synod or Assembly, except when brought under its *judicial* notice, by the proper action of the lower judicatories.

One thing more, sir. No measures, aimed to affect the rights and immunities of membership in the Presbyterian Church, which, when *directly* made, would be confessedly wrong; may even be justly employed, to accomplish the same end, *indirectly*. The contract between the church and her newly admitted members is a bona fide one. The terms of association are plain, and are distinctly declared. And when the connexion is thus legally formed, no man may honestly seek to injuriously affect it, by efforts to foist into the compact new features or mitigations of old ones. As the individual member, who should ignore an acknowledged doctrine, or seek to evade the legitimate operation of our government and discipline, would be justly considered as violating his obligations to the church, solemnly assumed when he entered it; so the church, through her legitimate tribu-

nals, having invested in the member admitted, the immunities of membership, should she attempt to alter the *terms*, or modify them so as injuriously to affect the enjoyment of them by the person thus admitted, would be rightfully charged with a breach of faith. Much more so, would be the conduct of her General Assemblies, when by the declaration of doctrines, and the establishment of tests of good standing, *not in the constitution*, nor contemplated when the connexion was formed, they should seek to surround sections of her membership with circumstances which would *morally* compel a course of conduct, not at all contemplated, when they united with the church; and which, in the circumstances, would seriously compromise their consciences and their happiness; or which would compel their withdrawal from the body altogether. Such *indirect* excision were a palpable violation of all the constitutional guarantees of our church rights.

Now, sir, in view of this preliminary examination of the Constitution of the Church; its nature; the principles on which, and mode in which it was formed; and its relations to the Bible and to membership in the Church; the tenure of ecclesiastical rights, and measure of the qualifications for their investment and enjoyment—we are prepared to advance a step, and to inquire how this abolition

movement and its professed ends, quadrate with this great charter of our rights.

1. It will be conceded, that nowhere, in the Constitution of the Church, is slave-holding expressly recognized as a subject of governmental cognizance, by any of our Church judicatories! Among our doctrines, nowhere is slave-holding mentioned as a heresy, or anti-slavery as a doctrine. Nowhere, in our authorized explications of the doctrines of the Church, made at such full length in the Catechisms, (especially the larger,) is the holding of slaves recognized as a crime, in *express terms*. Among the vast number and forms of evil, expressly recognized as calling for the cognizance of the Church Session and the Presbyteries, (the only bodies having original jurisdiction, under the Constitution, of disciplinary processes,) not once is slave-holding named! The relative duties of masters and slaves *are* recognized, and, by implication, the relation itself rather sustained than condemned. It is passing strange, that if this were the evil of evils—the abomination of the age—the deep and dreadful gangrene of the body, threatening to consume its vitals—the founders of the Church should not have *expressly* brought it under the ban of the Constitution.

And here, sir, let me remind my brethren of the Assembly, that in well regulated gov-

ernments, the absence of *express* authority, in the exercise of delegated powers, is always regarded with suspicion, and is looked upon as a demand for *caution*. In well balanced systems of judicial process, the plea of *want of power* is held to demand, justly and imperiously, the most careful and thorough review! If in an ecclesiastical Constitution there is conceded to be no direct and express recognition of slave-holding as a proper subject of cognizance of any of its judicatories, the strong presumption is, the framers of the instrument never intended it to be! But, sir, this presumption is rendered *morally certain*, when, in the

2d place, we refer to the circumstances under which our Constitution *was* formed!

Next to the language itself, there is no more satisfactory rule of getting at the *intentions* of the framers of an organic law, for either Church or State, than the circumstances in which they were known to be placed. At the time our Constitution was originally formed, it is a fact, that slave-holding, by church members, did extensively obtain. Slavery, as a civil institution, existed in all the States, with perhaps a single exception. When, subsequently, our Constitution was remodelled and again adopted as a whole, slave-holding was still common among both ministers and members. That

the framers of the Constitution did not intend to make an instrument that would necessarily cut themselves off from the Church which it was to govern, is a self-evident proposition! That they did do so, however, if slavery is, by the Constitution, a crime and a legitimate subject of governmental cognizance, needs no proof. Therefore we are driven, irresistibly, to the conclusion, that they *intended* no such thing!

It is nugatory to urge here, that "oppression" (which is condemned) is synonymous with slaveholding; and therefore the latter may be lawfully dealt with as a crime. The framers of the Constitution surely understood the *terms* they employed—at least in application to the *things* they had under consideration. The consideration suggested above, is proof, positive as demonstration, that *they* did not consider the *thing*—slaveholding—as synonymous with the *thing*—oppression—which they condemn!

Equally nugatory is it here to allege, that in the *Bible*, slave-holding and oppression are one and the same thing! For, admitting, for argument's sake, it were so, yet we are seeking, in these inquiries, what the *Presbyterian* Church finds in the Bible, as authoritatively declared in her Constitution; and not what individuals, in the exercise of their original freedom of inquiry, may have found

there. Slave-holding and oppression, then, are not the same, in the view of the framers of our Constitution: the one is a proper subject of disciplinary process—the other is not!

The bearing of all this, sir, will be very perceptible, in an illustration of its practical operation. Thirty-four years ago, believing myself prepared, by the grace of God, I knocked at the door of a church, in your connection, for admittance to membership. I was met at the threshold with the presentation of your *Confession of Faith*, and told that it contained the *terms* of admission. I was informed that *these* were the doctrines I was expected to believe, and the form of government and system of discipline the *Presbyterian* Church believed the Bible to teach, and to which I must promise submission; that *these* were the *only* conditions—these the *only tests* of qualification for membership. I adopted them—entered the Church, and by the compact, understood the Church to guarantee my rights and immunities of membership, so long as I fulfilled my obligations to her Constitution! No intimation was made to me, that my membership might be challenged, or its immunities affected by any thing not here provided for; and far less by any thing in me, or in my then and known condition, not now covered by the Constitution. I was *then* implicated in

slave-holding. Multitudes of other persons were received there, and all around me, into the Church, in the same "condemnation," if it were unlawful. The Sessions that received us were recognized by their Presbyteries, and these again by the Synods, and the Synods by the General Assembly! And in the Constitution—the basis of the compact formed with the Session—no mention was made of slave-holding, as a crime demanding censure. Now, sir, on what conceivable ground—just and right—can that circumstance be now dragged up, and *foisted* into the terms of membership, and made a test of Christian character, and brought to affect my good standing in the Church?

Twenty-five years ago, I applied to one of your Presbyteries for admission to the ministry of your Church—the Presbytery of Cincinnati, then headed by the venerable Dr. J. L. Wilson—a body of men no one could suspect of a lax regard to the Constitution. I was then admitted as a candidate. I was subsequently, by another Presbytery, having regular cognizance of my trials and studies, licensed and ordained. Here, as before, I was presented with the *Constitution*, as containing the Church's interpretation of the Word of God, the doctrines I was to believe and teach, and the governmental system I was to adopt. I did adopt them, and on

these *terms* entered her ministry! It was no part of the compact that my official immunities and rights were to depend on *any thing* not in the Book. I adopted the "Confession of Faith," and promised obedience to its laws, and claimed as my right, that as long as I taught its doctrines and conformed to its regulations, my ministerial standing and usefulness, and my personal happiness, as relates to my church connections, were guaranteed! Not a word of *slave-holding* being unlawful was uttered, and none found in the Book! Yet now, after the prime of life spent in her service, amid no ordinary share of trials, my fair standing is assailed, in memorials sent here, by entire Synods, and actual disciplinary processes are proposed, looking to my expulsion; and all on ground which existed at the time of my admission, and was known to exist by the Presbytery that ordained me. At the same time, the action of the Presbytery was sustained by the Synod, and its action by the Assembly! That ground of accusation, moreover, is nowhere recognized in the Constitution, which was the acknowledged *basis* of my admission! Who, sir—who, I ask with emphasis!—who would give a fig for constitutional guarantees, when thus trifled with and recklessly set aside! And in the light of such procedure, where, sir, were the solemn

oaths of fidelity to the Constitution, each delegate in this Assembly took upon his ordination?!

Moderator, I shall, doubtless, be told that the General Assembly is the highest judicatory of the Presbyterian church—that it has borne its testimony against *slavery* at intervals, from its origin—and that it has *powers* that cover the case, and that submission to its decrees, is among our “ordination vows” and conditions of admission to the church.

The General Assembly is indeed the highest judicatory of the church, but it is a body of limited powers. It is a *delegated* body, and can only act within the limits prescribed by the constitution. It has no power to declare articles of faith for the church. The church has established its own “doctrines” and declared its own terms of communion, and tests of Christian character. Within the sphere of its legitimate action, the Assembly is to be respected and its action is authoritative and binding—but out of that sphere it is *revolutionary*!

Action of Previous Assemblies.

The Assemblies of the church have indeed acted on the subject of slavery—that is, a *few* of them have! but sir, what is the pur-

port of their action? Has any Assembly ever said that to hold a slave, under the laws of the land, was a *crime*, demanding discipline? Has not every Assembly that ever acted on the subject, distinctly declined taking any such ground—nay, expressly or by necessary implication, *admitted* that slaveholding might exist in the church, without sin? Nay, did they not admit, by unavoidable implication, that *the* slaveholding in our church, was not sinful, in the fact, that discipline was never ordered? Brethren, sir, claim too much from the action of former Assemblies! Illegitimate and wrong as often was that action, it never went, to the extent sometimes claimed.

The action of past Assemblies, had reference, to a large extent, to the African slave trade, and to the *abuses* of the institution in the neglect of its relative duties—to the evils incident to the system, as it has operated at large. Yet, sir, I readily admit that past Assemblies have employed strong language—have explicitly condemned the “system of slavery” existing in the United States as a civil institution,—have used language in reference to its connexions with the church, which was calculated to bring into question the moral and Christian character of our people, implicated in it. And while distinctly declining to declare it essentially and necessarily sinful, by general terms and careful

refinements, they have sought to render it odious, and have, to some extent, visited upon our slaveholding members, by *moral force*, the disabilities of membership, that would have resulted from direct discipline, which, as the consummation of the "progress" sought and made from year to year, it is now proposed directly to endeavor.

All this, it is contended, is sustained by the clause in the constitution which gives the Assembly the power "of reproving, warning or bearing testimony against error in doctrine or immorality in practice, in any church, Presbytery or Synod." Slavery, it is assumed, is a heresy in doctrine and an immorality in practice; and that it exists among the ministers and members of the church located within the jurisdiction of some of our churches, Presbyteries and Synods. Accordingly, the Assembly may reprove or bear testimony against it. Now sir, in all due respect to brothers, I must dissent from the construction thus put upon the language of the constitution.

The Assembly may indeed bear testimony against error in doctrine and immorality in practice, but may it determine what is error and what is immorality? Our civil courts may administer punishment against murder, or arson, or treason, but may they determine what is murder, or arson, or treason? An-

other tribunal is clothed with this power. The things are specifically different. Under the clause quoted, may our Assemblies proceed to determine what is *doctrine* for the church? May we enlarge, alter, or modify the Confession of Faith, or the Form of Government and system of discipline, the church has adopted for herself? Certainly not. But what else is it, when we essay to determine "errors" in doctrine or "immoralities in practice?" Error is the negation of truth, and immorality, that of duty. Neither can be predicated but upon *truth* previously "determined" and duty or obligation previously recognized. Now all this the Presbyterian church has done for herself. She has gone to the Bible, the rule of faith and practice, and thence deduced her doctrines and their resulting duties; and these she has written down at large in her confession of faith, and these are the doctrines and duties, that become the subject of the official attention of her judicatories. Accordingly, the "errors" in doctrine and immoralities in practice, against which the Assembly may bear testimony, are errors which are the negation of *such* doctrines as the constitution embraces, as doctrines which the church has drawn from the Bible; and of such duties as the church has gathered from the same source — *not the DETERMINATION, for the CHURCH,*

WHAT ARE ERRORS OR IMMORALITIES ! This, sir, is a vital distinction.

Slaveholding not Considered an Immorality.

Accordingly, before the agitation of slavery by the Assembly, and disciplinary measures against slaveholding can be sustained by this clause of the constitution, it must be shown that the church has settled, for herself, that these are matters cognizable to her tribunals—that slaveholding is an “immorality” in practice—that the immunities and rights of membership, under the constitution in any way depend upon our personal opinions or action in relation to slaveholding. In all the Confession of Faith, express mention of slaveholding as a sin, it will be conceded, is no where to be found. By plain implication, the contrary is there. In our authoritative explication of the 4th and the 10th commandments, the relation of master and servant is explicitly recognized as an existing fact, and its mutual duties are specified. The entire and uniform practice of the church is to the same point. In all its history, not a case can be adduced, as is supposed, when in admitting a member into the church, or a minister to our connexion, the individual was ever given to understand, that the rights and immunities of his membership, were to de-

pend upon his ignoring the civil institution of slavery ; or that holding a slave would be regarded as an “immorality ” demanding the “reproof ” of the Assembly. In no one instance, it is believed, in the entire history of the Presbyterian church, has an individual member been disciplined for holding slaves ; or has there been a *judicial decision* by any of its judicatories, that such relation was an immorality. May the Assembly then, in the exercise of its authority, to bear testimony against “errors in doctrine and immoralities in practice,” assume that slaveholding is an immorality, in the absence of all *express* constitutional authority, and in the face of the uniform and entire practice of the church, and all judicial decisions upon the point. If so, sir, our Assembly is an irresponsible Body, of unlimited power, and all the guarantees of the constitution, are idle wind ! All the precious immunities of membership are held at the caprice of those who may accidentally compose a General Assembly.—The excising measures of 1837 and ’38, need no broader ground of support or better defence.

Is it urged, in reply, that an “offence ” is defined by our Book of Discipline, to be “any thing in the principles or practice of a church member which is contrary to the word of God ; or which, if not, in its own nature sin-

ful, may tempt others to sin." And that "nothing ought to be considered an *offence*, or admitted as matter of accusation, which cannot be proved to be such by Scripture, or the practice of the church founded on Scripture; that this language contemplates a reference to the *Scripture*, when we are examining the character of things charged to be "immoral;" and that accordingly, if the Assembly thinks that slaveholding is an "offence," or is sinful, *from the Scriptures*, then it is bound to "reprove, warn, or bear testimony against it."

Now, sir, has the brother that urges this view, overlooked the *consequences* of the position, and the *principle* it involves? Does he fail to see, that his interpretation, invests the Assembly with the *entire* power of the *church*; and totally supercedes the constitution? Who is to judge whether conduct in a given case is contrary to the word of God, and thus assume the character of an "offence?" If the General Assembly has the power, then we all hold our rights of membership, upon the interpretation of the Bible by the General Assembly, and not upon the constitution! And as each General Assembly expires with the term of its sittings, no man can know what the tenures of his membership are except as each Assembly may determine! for the plea urged, assumes that

the *Assembly*, is empowered to determine whether slaveholding is an immorality; and on the basis of that determination to “reprove and bear testimony against it.” But the church, in her extended explanation of the doctrines she draws from the Bible, and of the immoralities which result from violating the duties of religion, no where puts slaveholding in that category. The assumption is therefore unfounded. The right to determine the point is not in the Assembly, but in the church. If the Assembly may take the entire field of human conduct, into examination, and of its own right, determine for Presbyterians, what is immorality, and on the ground of that determination, proceed to “reprove” and thus punish, where were the guarantees of the constitution, of a *fair trial*; and that according to principles of discipline previously settled, for applying “that system of laws which Christ has appointed in His church?”

The Eighth Commandment.

Is it urged, sir, that the answer to the question, “What is forbidden in the eighth commandment?” (which commandment is a part of our Constitution, as is also the explanation of its import, given in the Catechism,) after repeating a number of *particu-*

lars, adds—"and all other unjust or sinful ways of taking or withholding from our neighbor what belongs to him, or of enriching ourselves"—that a discriminating power is here given, by necessary implication, to bring given things under the range of general principles, and subject them to ecclesiastical cognizance and censure, though not specifically named in the Constitution as pertaining to that category.

I answer, 1st. That in the part of the Constitution referred to, we have what the Presbyterian Church understands the Bible to intend by the eighth commandment of the decalogue. If there is any thing predicable of human conduct, to which the *principle* of that command implies, besides what is *specified*, it is to be put into the same category. Now the point is, when it is assumed that this or that is of that class, who is to *determine* the fact? The things *specified* in the answer referred to, were determined to belong to the category of things forbidden by that commandment, by the Church for herself, and not by the Assembly. If any *other* thing is to be *added*, it must be by the same authority. There must be a falling back upon that *fulness* of power to interpret the Bible for the Presbyterian Church, which is in the Church itself, and not to that limited delegated power which is in the General

Assembly. If the Assembly has the power to determine what are to be "offences" cognizable to our system of discipline, beyond what the Constitution specifies, then again we have no constitutional guarantees at all, and our dearest rights and privileges are at the mercy of this temporary body.

But I answer, 2d. That the intended application of this assumption only demonstrates its absurdity. Slave-holding is not specified among the things forbidden by the eighth commandment. No; but then it is added, after a number of specifications, "and all other unjust and sinful ways of taking and withholding from our neighbor what belongs to him." Liberty is withheld from the slave; this withholdment is of what "*belongs to him*;" slave-holding is therefore a breach of the eighth commandment—it is "*unjust and sinful*." Now, sir, I ask, whose province is it to *determine* that fact for the Presbyterian Church? Each individual may interpret the Bible for himself; but as Presbyterians, we have pledged ourselves to the principle of submission to the Church's interpretation. Yet here it is claimed that the Assembly may determine it—a temporary body, having limited and clearly defined powers, to be followed next year by a similar body, and of the same powers! There were no determinate and

fixed results practicable, in the nature of the case! Look at the facts. The founders of the Presbyterian Church were largely themselves slave-holders. When the Constitution was remodeled and again adopted as a whole, a very large portion of the ministers, elders and members were slave-holders. When they adopted the Constitution, did they intend, by the clause under review, to give the latitude claimed; and by the very Constitution adopted, fatally condemn themselves? Such a supposition were an absurdity!

Again: All the Assemblies that have ever acted on slavery, have refused to take the ground assumed in the case before us; for, let it be observed, if the objection to our construction of the Constitution, which we are now considering, has *any* force at all, it is, that to hold a slave is *sinful*; and on that ground the Assembly may condemn it. Assemblies have pronounced "*the system* of slavery in these United States" essentially unrighteous, and "slavery" to be a "blot upon our holy religion." But when they approached the practical question, and would touch slave-holding by *Presbyterians*, they have fallen back, as if fatally touched by the ægis of the Constitution! If slave-holding is a breach of the eighth commandment, then it is *sinful* and *unjust*, and like "fraud, theft and robbery," is to be disci-

plined! The conclusion is irresistible! Why have our Assemblies exhibited to the world the mournful spectacle of grave ecclesiastical bodies, wavering, undecided, now advancing, now receding? At one time pronouncing "slavery" a blot upon religion; at another, recognizing the practicability of its imparting no guilt;—pronouncing a whole political system "essentially unrighteous," and yet members of the Church, practically operating under that system, not guilty! Or if, in some undefined way, and to some undetermined extent, guilty, yet not to be disciplined! All this, sir, is proof clear as demonstration, that the *Constitution* of the Church has ever been felt to be invaded, when this slavery agitation has been entertained by the Assembly! With the nature of that compact, as the great guarantee of our Church immunities, as the fundamental law of the Presbyterian organization, never can be harmonized the power and prerogatives here claimed for our General Assemblies. And confusion of counsel, and "delphic utterances," discreditable to our dignity, and prejudicial to our prosperity, must ever result from the attempt.

Confusion of Thought in Past Action.

My remarks upon the relations of the slavery agitation to the Constitution of the

Church, I will close with two observations. The “unsteadiness” of our action has resulted from *confusion* of thought on two vital points. We have, in the first instance, confounded, in our conceptions of power and prerogative, the *General Assembly* with the *Church*. The theory of our Constitution is, that “every Christian church, or union or association of churches, is entitled to declare the terms of admission to its communion, and the qualifications of its ministers and members, as well as the whole system of its internal government, which Christ hath appointed”—to make its own Constitution or fundamental law. This the *Presbyterian* Church has done for herself. This, any and all Churches may of right do. *They* may go to the Bible and draw thence doctrines to be believed and government to be adopted, and the *tests* on which members are to be admitted, and ministers ordained, and discipline administered! The General Assembly, however, is but a creature of the Church—a temporary body, of specific delegated powers, designed simply as an instrument for carrying out the system adopted by the *Church*. In the fulness of power, in the latter, the Bible is interpreted. In the restricted prerogatives of the former, that interpretation is to be carried out. These essential distinctions have been overlooked, or partially con-

founded. Hence Assemblies have been invoked to legislate *new bases* of Church rights, and new tests of membership and Christian character—to assume the prerogatives of the *Church!* This great error produced the revolution of '37 and '38, and underlies this entire slavery agitation! “Why,” says a brother on this floor, heralded also beforehand as one of its ablest constitutional lawyers—“the General Assembly can declare *any thing* in reference to doctrine, or immorality in practice”! The memorials which abolition Presbyteries and Synods have for years been sending up, and the phraseology which abolition speakers and papers constantly employ, involves the same fundamental error.

I concede, indeed, that to a large extent, it is but what was to have been anticipated. We have now, and have long had mingled up ecclesiastically with us, an element seemingly incapable of assimilation to true Presbyterianism; whose early prejudices and habitudes of thought associate all idea of ecclesiastical power with that of the single church! It is not at all strange that a man born and raised a Congregationalist, should constantly, in his conceptions of Church prerogative, invest the Assembly, or Synod, or Presbytery, with the *powers* of the *Church*. Whenever he acts ecclesiastically at all, he

feels the power of the Church is possessed in full! And accordingly, whatever the Church may of right do, any judicatory of the Church may do! The prevalency of the Congregational element may therefore naturally account for this mistake. The conclusion is strengthened by the fact that from such elements, extremest views of slavery, and greatest urgency for action by the Assembly, seem to proceed. That native trained Presbyterians should have committed so great an error, is more strange.

Want of Discrimination—Private Judgment.

In the second instance, we have not clearly discriminated between our privileges and rights, as *individuals*, and as a *body* of Christians, in relation to the Scriptures. Our Constitution is founded on the principle that God is “sole Lord of the conscience”—that conscience is “left free from the commandments of men”—that the “rights of private judgment, in all matters that respect religion, are universal and unalienable.” Accordingly, it is the right of every Christian man to go to God’s Word for himself, and under the highest responsibilities, he is to examine it for himself, and from it form his own “Confession of Faith.” But when two or more Christians, who have done

this, compare notes and find such a harmony of results as lays a basis for union, they form a "particular Church," which Church has the "right to dictate the *terms* of admission into *its* communion, the qualifications of its ministers and members, as well as the whole system of its internal government." When such a social compact is once formed, then its Constitution is to its members that Church's interpretation of the Bible! And while an individual continues a member, and enjoys or claims its immunities, he must conform to that *compact*. If his conscience is disturbed, and he cannot bring the body to his views, he must leave! To continue and *agitate*, would be to *violate* the terms of admission. In the slavery agitation this distinction has been overlooked! Men, in their eagerness to carry a point, have laid too heavy a stress upon their individual relations to the great work of interpreting the Bible, and too little upon their obligations of obedience to the Church! "The Saviour is the sole Lord of our conscience," it is urged; "we are responsible to Him, and must give an account. His Word is truth, and *must* be preached. As *His* ministers, we must cry aloud and spare not. Slave-holding *is* a *sin*. The slave *is* chattelized into a beast of burden. We *must* agitate, until his rights are respected!!" But, Moderator, with all this

admitted, as *Presbyterians*, owe we no obligations to our Church—to our own solemn vows to abide her constitutional judgments? In her Constitution is the “system of doctrines” and “whole internal government,” which she believes Christ taught. On the ground of our agreement in all this, and our promise to abide it, we were admitted to her communion! If now we differ from her, honor and duty alike require us to retire, and not to disturb her peace.

The result, then, Moderator and brethren of the Assembly, is that, by the Constitution of our Church, this “slavery agitation” is unlawful, as tending to impinge the rights of your membership. I now proceed to inquire whether your Constitution, thus interpreted, is not sustained by the teachings of the Scriptures?

Slaveholding and the Bible.

The teachings of the sacred Scriptures on the subject of slavery, might indeed be profitably examined to the extent of a treatise. Their substance, however, is easily and shortly reached. We need not detain the Assembly on this part of our work.

The Bible, in both the Old and New Testaments, refers to slavery in its relations to civil society, or recognizes it as pertaining to

that category of social existence ; and involving, as an essential element, the idea of "property in man"—a right to control the services of the slave for the pecuniary advantage of the owner, without the slaves's consent : and that slaveholding, did not prejudice the master's claims to be a holy man, or to the immunities of church membership. If this be so, then it must be shown that a like *civil relation* now, must be connected with circumstances or characteristics which necessarily alter the case ; or this abolition agitation is as unscriptural as unconstitutional, inasmuch as the very gist of it is, that it tends to injure the good standing in the church, of your slaveholding membership.

The Old Testament—Exodus 21 : 20, 21. "And if a man smite his servant or his maid with a rod, and he die under his hand, he shall be surely punished. Notwithstanding if he continue a day or two, he shall not be punished, for *he is his money*." Here the master, in the legal inquiry into the character of the killing of the slave, was entitled to have his pecuniary interest in the slave, taken into the account, as creating a natural presumption against the *malice* which would constitute murder. If the person killed was his "money," the natural conclusion would be that self-interest would check passion and

curb malice, and that, therefore, the killing would naturally be presumed to have been unintentional. This single passage as distinctly recognizes "property in man," as an element of the slavery which existed among the Jews, as volumes could possibly do. But the provision is a part of a code of civil regulations proclaimed by Moses for the government of the Jewish state: and proclaimed by the immediate direction of Moses' Master, the Creator himself. If then there is in the nature of the thing, slavery, any essential unrighteousness, it here attaches to God himself. But we may examine further: In Levit. 25: 44—46. "Both thy bond men and thy bond maids which thou shalt have, shall be of the heathen that are round about you; of *them* shall ye buy bond men and bond maids. Moreover, of the children of the strangers that do sojourn among you, of them shall ye buy, and of their families that are with you, which they begat in your land: And they shall be your *possession*: And ye shall take them as an inheritance for your children after you, to *inherit* them for a possession;—*they* shall be your bond men *forever*."

I will only observe further, that in the 4th and 10th commandments of the decalogue, the relation is referred to, as a thing likely to exist, and provision made for the moral and religious bearings of the institution.

I will quote no other passages. These are as *decisive* as language could make the case. A word in reference to the rule of interpretation and the application of these teachings to the case before us. The position has been taken on this floor, that the Bible on this subject, must first be consulted as to its *general principles* of morality, and then by *these*, the language of particular passages must be construed: that the neglect of this, is the most fruitful source of heresies; and of their defence. Now, sir, I dissent from the position, in this relation. When the language fails to give the meaning clearly and decisively, we may construe, to a certain extent, by general principles, elsewhere made out. But the language, when clear and explicit, is our first and most satisfactory criterion of the author's meaning. The Scriptures were addressed to the common sense of mankind; and when their language is clear and decisive to that common sense, it *is* the meaning intended. The fruitful source of heresies, is the *first* consulting our instincts and feelings, as to what *ought* to be meant, and then twisting the language of the passage to suit our theory. General principles, here claimed to control the language, are themselves but deductions drawn from the common sense interpretation of the language.

Revert to the passages quoted. No con-

ceivable language could more distinctly convey the meaning, that of the servitude referred to the "right of property" was the living element. The idea is not only expressed in the simplest, clearest manner, but is incorporated with a *class* of ideas, and woven into a system of things which are left utterly meaningless, if that idea is taken out. It is contemplated as bearing upon the legal ascertainment of the *animus*, in homicides. It is made to enter into the system of legal transmission of property, and the laws of inheritance.

Let it be also observed, that at the time these laws were enacted, the Jews did not hold a single slave, so far as we can discover. They were in the wilderness, not long from bondage themselves. The civil code now promulged by Moses, was in anticipation of their national enfranchisement in Canaan.—It was accordingly, not the restriction and limitation of an institution, then in existence; but the divine authorization of one soon to arise. Nothing more nor less can be made of it. Many indeed, and salutary were the limitations and restrictions and guards, appointed to secure the relations from *abuse*. And if you say, the religious system contemporaneously adopted, tended to meliorate the condition of slaves, and ultimately remove the institution of slavery from society alto-

gether, I have no objection to the position ; I believe it was so. The ultimate results of that religion, were the elevation of all classes of men, to a fitness for a form of social order, in which all were fully prepared to participate—this *was* its tendency ! But all this only sustains both the *fact* and the *propriety* of the intervening order of things. Slaveholding then under the Old Testament, was of Divine authority, was a *civil* institution, only cognizable to ecclesiastical supervision, except as the duties of the parties were neglected ; and as under the Jewish theocracy, the civil and ecclesiastical administration were in the same individuals.

The New Testament.

In the New Testament, the severance of the *civil* and the *ecclesiastical*, was at once and complete. The Saviour said, “render to Cæsar the things that be Cæsar’s, and to God the things that be God’s” :—the jurisdictions are separate and distinct. When even an illegal tax was exacted, that *His* business might receive no detriment from a confliction with the authorities of the state, he promptly paid it. To the civil authority and the institutions of the state, he yielded, all his life, the deference and allegiance of a good citizen. Even when injustice mingled itself

in the proceedings of the state in reference to himself, if it pertained to his civil relations he submitted. So did likewise his apostles and disciples. Among the arrangements of the state, in which they lived and acted, *slavery*, it is conceded on all hands, did exist, and to an extent and in offensive forms, not excelled in any age or country. Now how did they act in reference to this civil arrangement? The question is answered most satisfactorily in their own language and conduct. One thing is conceded—they preached the Gospel, were successful, and founded churches, where slavery was, and had for centuries, been a law of the land. Such surely were the circumstances, when it was most natural, they should have taught and incorporated “abolitionism” into the Christian organizations they founded. It was the commencement of things—they were establishing *model* churches. Into those churches they were receiving men and women of all classes in society—*masters* and *slaves*. Here, above all conceivable cases, was the very one, when, if that relation was “sinful,” when, if any where, the *church* might assail the arrangements of the state, and make a man’s relations as a citizen, exactly tally with those he held to the church—when, in short, the church might, if ever, make a man’s civil relation an object of ecclesiastical supervision.

What, sir, were the facts? No where in all the ministry of Christ or of His apostles, was a master ever told he could not be a Christian while holding his fellow man in bondage—that he must manumit his slaves before he could be received into the church—that it was a blot upon religion! And yet, when in all the range of things conceivable, were there a more proper and befitting occasion?

But, sir, let us revert to their language. They did not pass the subject over in silence. They spoke of it often, and very emphatically. Eph. 6: 5, 6, and 9. "Servants be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in *singleness* of your heart as unto Christ; not with eye service as men pleasers, but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. And ye masters do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening." Col: 3: 22. "Servants obey, in all things, your masters according to the flesh, not with eye service, as men-pleasers, but in singleness of heart, fearing God." 1 Peter 2: 18. "Servants be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but to the froward." Titus 2: 9, 10. "Exhort servants to be obedient unto their own masters, and to please them well in all things, not answering again, not purloining, but showing all good fidelity; that they may

adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour, in all things." 1 Tim. 6: 1—5. "Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honor that the name of God be not blasphemed. And they that have believing masters, let them not despise them because they are brethren, but rather do them service, because they are faithful and beloved, partakers of the benefit—these things teach and exhort."

Now, sir, paraphrase these apostolic injunctions. Note the circumstances under which, and the persons to whom they were addressed. These writers were Apostles of Christ. They "spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." They were now founding the *first* Christian organizations, such as were to be *models* to all future missionaries. They were gathering the material of their churches from communities whose civil organizations embraced "slavery." Their converts were of both masters and slaves, as well as parents and children, husbands and wives, rulers and subjects. The relative duties of these several classes they pointed out and enforced. Passing from those of the other classes, they came to *masters* and *slaves*. The former, when entering the church, was told to be kind to his servants; not to distress and annoy them with needless ascerbity of language; and to give them what, in the

relation, was *just* and *equal*. The latter they told not to run away, but to be obedient, humble, respectful, faithful—to count their masters worthy of all honor; to serve them willingly and in singleness of heart—even the perverse and cruel were to be patiently endured. They were not to “despise” them, even when Christian brethren with themselves, or on that ground to claim immunities from the obedience and deference due them. All this was to be done, “that God and His doctrine be not blasphemed”—that no charge be raised through the community to the detriment of the Gospel, as if it interfered with the order of civil society, and encouraged servants to become disobedient and rebellious, and thus tended to confusion!

Moderator, may I not remind my brethren of the Assembly, that this is apostolic, divinely inspired teaching. The happy tendencies of such instructions are indeed plainly to be seen. But, sir, how infinitely remote from the superior wisdom of our times!—Those who originated and have mainly prosecuted this slavery agitation—and no single Assembly has ever “borne testimony” against this “immorality”—have openly countenanced and advised the running away of slaves, and even have thrown themselves in direct hostility to the laws of the land respecting the recovery of fugitives. Elders

in our churches have boasted of their complicity with under-ground railroad schemes to aid slaves away from their masters. All manner of hard names and opprobrious epithets have been heaped upon masters. Entire States have been insulted, and their institutions "despised" and denounced, until "God and his doctrine" have been so blasphemed that it has become almost impossible for us, who try to preach the Gospel to them, to gain their attention, except through our disconnection with you. Ministers and churches are extensively suspected of sinister designs against the State. Statesmen, in our Legislative and Congressional Halls, before the world, boldly charge Christianity with conspiring treason, and aiming to subjugate the State to the Church. There are large districts in the South where a Northern minister would be received with suspicion, and where ministers of known abolition sentiments and agitating tempers, would not be tolerated. Now, sir, I earnestly ask brethren to compare the teaching and conduct of the Apostles with abolition reformers; and mark the contrast! Mark, sir, the graphic language in which the Apostle Paul prophetically portrays the characteristics of this "agitation," as well as the pointed terms in which he condemns the neglect of his injunctions—"If any man teach *otherwise*, and

consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is after godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions, and strifes of words, whereof cometh *envy, strifes, railings, evil-surmisings*, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: From such withdraw thyself." 1 Tim. 6: 3—5. This, sir, was the "testimony" of an inspired Apostle, "against the immorality" of abolition agitation in his day—against the principle of ecclesiastical interference in the affairs of the State. It was *then* the doctrine of *Christ*, a doctrine "after godliness," that the Gospel claims no right to disturb the relation of master and slave, as an existing civil institution—that complicity with this civil institution created no prejudice against one's Christian character, and constituted no disability for church membership. Now, sir, is the metaphysical dogma of "*intrinsic* right and wrong"—for whose protection there seems to be a special invocation of our guardianship at present—to be assumed as the "doctrine of our Church?" Be it so. Then the relation of master and slave, thus sustained by apostolic teaching, was either "*intrinsically* right or wrong." If it was intrinsically right, then the recognition of it by the Apostles was itself *right*. If it was

intrinsically *wrong*, then the Apostles were shamefully derelict in duty, in not wiping the "blot from religion" and the Church! And further, if there was no intrinsic wrong in Christians holding slaves under the "system of slavery" then obtaining in the State, there can be none in the present case, unless it can be shown that the circumstances which rendered it not improper to be a slaveholder *then*, were totally different from those that surround the case now. This will not, I presume, be seriously attempted.

Is it asked, sir, that after all thus urged, whether the religion of Christ, as developed in the Bible, especially in the New Testament, is to be so interpreted as to afford us no hope of the relief of the slave from his bondage—as to countenance and sustain civil arrangements that involve the oppression of the feeble, and the perpetuation of a tyrannic rule of the poor? I answer, No! God forbid! The tendency of religion is to establish in man's heart, a heart and life controlling benevolence, that can only find its gratification in the diffusion of happiness. As it gains control, selfishness, depraved passion and appetite yield their influence, and man is elevated in all the elements of the highest civilization. In this civilization, all the forms of social existence assume the highest style, and man approximates primeval happi-

ness and rectitude. In the meantime, civil forms must be adapted to his condition. Any government is better than anarchy. Civil liberty, in the hands of the ignorant and degraded, were like edged tools in the hands of children. In the regulation of civil forms, Christianity assumes no right of direct interference. She takes man *as he is*, wherever found. She seeks to infuse the leaven of her influence into his *heart*, and *thus* to elevate and refine him, leaving his civil relations to take their desired changes, as the *result* of his christianization. Accordingly as the Gospel has gained foothold, the people have become at once enlightened and purified, and gradually advanced to higher degrees of civil liberty. The Constitution of the State has felt its soft and plastic touch. All changes in advance of the proper preparation, would be real evils instead of blessings. Hence it is *intrinsically* right, that existing forms of civil society should not be changed, except as the result of the desired preparation. Hence the Apostles never assumed to meddle with affairs of State. Hence missionaries of the Gospel to heathen lands never begin by assailing the State. Such a course would be instant death to their hopes of success. They depend on the leavening influence of religion to effect the desired reforms. And, sir, I venture to say, that the

same well-tryed policy were not inapplicable to ourselves, though we are enveloped in the blazing light of the nineteenth century! Preach the Gospel. Confine yourself to the sphere confessedly legitimate to the Church. She will be as she has ever been, a "city set on a hill." You will reach at once the heart of the master and of the slave. The former you will mould to the image of Christ—his heart to the spirit of love. The latter you will elevate and purify, and *fit* for the higher forms of civil freedom. And when so fitted, civil society *will* adapt itself to his capacities. Already much has been accomplished. From the lowest degree of heathenish degradation, the negro race among us have reached a considerable degree of Christian civilization. They are, sir—(and I speak from the convictions of thirty years' careful observation)—they are now rising in all the elements of such a civilization, with a far greater rapidity than did ever any heathen people known to history! Cease these hurtful and injudicious interferences with the State in reference to them. Return to the policy of the Apostles. Use all the mightily increased facilities for giving force to the Gospel, so characteristic of the age. Recognize the master's civil rights; urge the slave to a quiet acquiescence in the necessities of his lot, and a diligent use of his facilities for improvement—*then*

your way to the heart of each is opened. You will then be in the highway to the desired consummation. No, sir; no good man could desire the perpetuation of slavery. No good man can desire the continuance of the facts that give existence to slavery, and on which its continuance depends. For the present these facts do exist—slavery exists. And all such agitation of the subject as tends to bring the Church and the State into collision, cause God and his doctrine to be blasphemed. All such agitation as tends to bring discredit upon our Church membership who are slaveholders, and injure their church immunities, is as unscriptural as it is contrary to our ecclesiastical Constitution!

THE RESULTS OF THE AGITATION.

We shall now, sir, advance to a rapid review of the “results of this agitation,” as hitherto carried on; and seek in them, testimony as to its character. In the light of these, if we mistake not, we shall find abundant confirmation of the conclusions to which our examination of its relations to the Constitution and the Scriptures has already conducted us.

Results upon the Negro Race.

Twenty years' agitation, with all its expenditure of thought and of pecuniary means, has failed utterly to solve the problem of their escape from bondage to a better condition! You have indeed rendered the race among us, both free and bond, restless and discontented;—the free, with the very partial degree of elevation they reach, even in the free States; the slave, with his bonds. The agitation has opened a faint glimpse into a higher sphere, as almost in reach of the freed, and thereby stimulated a keener desire for its attainment, only to be followed by a deeper despondency, as the facts, rendering its attainment impossible, show themselves to be insuperable. It has enticed thousands of slaves to escape from their masters, with high hopes of a glorious achievement, to be followed by despair and desperation. I hold it, sir, as incapable of successful challenge, that the negro race, in this country, in Canada, in the English West Indies, that have been freed, have been decidedly injured by the change. In the slave States, this agitation has crippled, if not extinguished all ideas of emancipation for the present—has originated a necessity for a more rigid police—has injuriously affected

the slave through the aggravation of the masters' passions and the excitement of his fears—has curtailed their liberties and privileges—has exposed them to summary and terrible measures, upon slight exposure to the charge of insurrectionary movements and purposes—has occasioned the enactment of severe laws, and created a jealousy of all measures looking to their instruction. Christian owners have been thus crippled in the indulgence of kindness toward slaves, and in prosecuting schemes for their amelioration. And all this, in the face of an utter failure to devise any "better way." You rouse the master's conscience to his fearful responsibilities. He is a good man and a sensible. What is to be done? It is an awful sin in the sight of God—a blot upon religion. *Emancipate at once!* His slave is ignorant, thriftless—has no habits essential to self-protection. Where shall he go? What shall he do? You say, rid yourself of the "foul sin," without regard to consequences! His common sense and honesty both rebel. No. Show him what is to be done with the slave, when he is free; where he is to go, and the guarantee of his amelioration. All this the slavery agitation of twenty years has utterly failed to do. Cease it, then, and return to the apostolic plan.

Results upon the Church.

The slavery agitation has been the ploughshare of division to almost all the denominations of the country, having a Southern membership—to all who have entertained it, as an adopted policy, excepting our own; and how long the exception here can be pleaded is extremely uncertain. With all the connected strife and bitterness of intestine conflict, it has utterly devoured the two largest denominations in the country—has riven them into fragments, which, in bitterest strife, are descending to the gulf of mutual distrust. Upon our own Church, what has been its result? After twenty years' earnest discussion, have our counsels been harmonized, our sentiments approached unity, and our borders been filled with peace! Nay, we have heard but little else than the din of battle. Our Assemblies have been rendered arenas for annual conflicts, which have made us a spectacle to the world, and a butt of ridicule to the ungodly, while the sympathies, which were the bonds of union, have been gradually eaten out by the spirit of discord. Our denominational action has been crippled; our benevolent enterprises have been poisoned by its virus. The schemes of beneficence in which, with brethren of like faith in other

bodies, we were wont to co-operate, and in which we were wont to find the peculiarity of "our mission"—the Tract and Missionary Societies, (Domestic and Foreign,) have all been made to feel its withering touch. Sir, I boldly charge upon this agitation, more than all other causes, the responsibility of the failure of that new phase of modern Christianity—our co-operative enterprises of benevolence.

It has disturbed our intercourse with kindred churches, which, in former times, was so delightful, and which had so much influence upon the religious prosperity of a previous generation. Those brethren and we once walked in Christian fellowship, and our seasons of mutual visitation were hailed with delight by all. We met, and talked, and prayed, on terms of Christian courtesy. But, sir, how is it now? I wish to use no hard words. I will not descend to the gross. Yet in all honesty I must say, that the terms on which it is now demanded that our intercourse (I mean that with our corresponding bodies) shall be based, contains the essence of ecclesiastical arrogance—terms that, if submitted to, would be the abandonment, on our part, of the last vestige of self-respect!

But, sir, a worse result still, if possible, is to be noticed. The agitation has tended largely to put us as a church, into the position

of *politicians*! A fierce political struggle over slavery has been progressing for years. It has become an active and potent element in the politics of the country. Politicians, with occasional and noble exceptions, are a godless brood, controlled by the *seven principles*, of the “five loaves and two fishes,”—the “spirit of public plunder”—amid whose conflicts every thing “fair, and of good report” is readily sacrificed. Their breath, blown now cold and now hot, upon the church of Christ, is a moral sirocco to her life. Into these turbid waters the slavery agitation has plunged the church! Her ministry it has placed upon the platform, and led to participate in the excitements and ape the performances of the political stump speaker. The abolition resolves of the Assembly are hailed by one party—cursed by the other. Politicians, like swarms of flies, flock about your sittings, buz stimulants into your ears, and by exciting huzzas and inflammatory paragraphs, urge you to measures which they can turn to account, in their partizan politics; and thus, has this unfortunate agitation, been made to pander, through our ecclesiastical blundering, to political corruption. By one party we are cursed—by another praised! Any church thus rendered a catspaw to politicians, has been shorn of its strength and its honor together. Why sir, I have all around

me sad complaints of this very evil. In one instance, part of a church excommunicating the rest for *voting* for certain candidates for the Presidency! Ministers dismissed for preaching politics and for not preaching politics—churches, divided between the republican and democratic parties; and each threatening to break up the congregation, as the Assembly shall or shall not, “drive off the South”! How heart-sickening, moderator! And is this the once united, orderly and heavenly prospered church, eschewing the things of the world, as well as its “kingdoms,” which our fathers founded under God, and justly boasted of its *severance from the State*, and its disconnexion with the “entangling alliances” of politics! Christ said “His kingdom was not of this world, else would (and therefore would not) his servants *fight*.” When one invoked his interference in the settlement of a controversy with his brother about *property*, Christ let him know that His business, was not with secular matters. But now his servants, grown more wise, are coveting the huzzas of the political crowd, and by petitions, thrusting their heads into our legislative and congressional halls, seeking to affect great and momentous political measures, to teach “our senators wisdom,” and even to *instruct* the learned functionaries of the supreme court of the nation,

in the science of our civil jurisprudence!—Alas! how are the mighty fallen! What moral comet has come into collision with the world, with our church, and by the collision, has so changed its divine *polarity*?—The slavery agitation, sir!!

Results upon the Exhibition of the Gospel.

Once more sir. The results of this agitation upon our exhibition of the Gospel, as a divine system for men's recovery, are worthy of our consideration.

Christ and Him crucified, is the grand summary of the Gospel—the centre about which cluster all the truths of religion, and from which they derive their converting power. To this central idea every gospel sermon should in some way point, and on it depend for its power. The slavery agitation has occasioned a distorted presentation of the Gospel, by us. The mind of the preacher has been absorbed by a politico-religious idea. The great cardinal truths of the Gospel have been measurably overlooked, in seeking its full development. The negro's deliverance from his civil bondage, has been permitted to absorb the mind, and the gospel deliverance of the soul from sin has been crowded out. The mote that plays in the sun-beam, may be held so close to the eye

as to shut out all the world beside. It is painfully evident that from the eyes of many, the last 20 years, abolitionism has utterly shut out every thing else. It is with no surprise therefore, that the statistics of our church are found to show a wide difference in the number of conversions, between different sections of our jurisdiction—those in which this agitation has been rife, and those where it has been ignored. Nor is it with surprise that we hear leading men, on this floor, refer that difference to this very cause.

Again. It has aimed a heavy blow at the very foundations of our faith in the Bible as a Divine Revelation. The proper proof of a Divine Revelation is that which none but God could give professedly in attestation of such origin. The great proof of Revelation is *miracles*. “The works that I do,” said Christ, and which no other man ever did—or mere man could do—“these bear witness of me.” They *did* prove His divine mission! And when Revelation is thus *proven*, all we have to do, is to square ourselves by what it teaches. But abolitionism must consult *our* INSTINCTS, form our own notions of what *ought* to be in the Bible, and then square all its language, however direct and palpable in itself, by these previous criteria of our own divining; “for illustration, slavery is, (say they,) contrary to our natu-

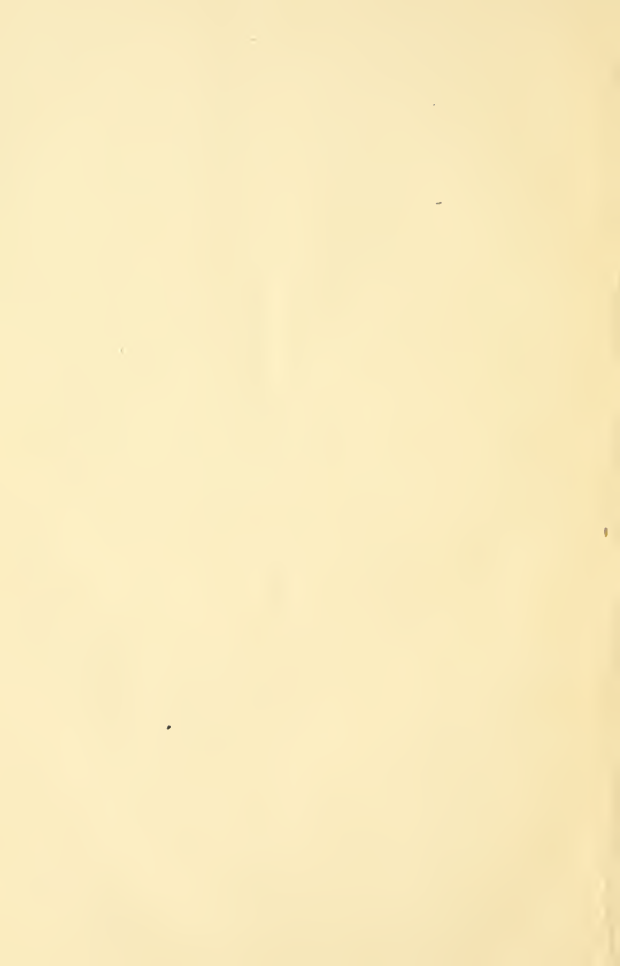
ral sense of what is *right*. Slavery cannot *therefore* be in the Bible—slavery therefore is not in the Bible. See the *practical* result. If the Bible recognised slavery, I would at once *burn* it!" Now sir, it is an instructive commentary, on all this process of reasoning, worthy of our consideration.—Multitudes of those who first and at successive periods of this agitation, fell into this vicious reasoning, have actually reached the darkest infidelity. Finding, to their common sense, the Bible did recognise slaveholding as consistent with piety, they have indeed ignored its claims to divinity; and rather than surrender a favorite dogma and sacrifice their pride to their duty, have plunged into the dark abyss; and become the boldest blasphemers of God and his word. The rock on which they split, is that on which others may split. If the divine authority of the Bible has no better foundation than the conceits of the human mind—the instinctive feelings of our nature, as now broken and disordered by sin, then indeed does the superstructure rest on *sand*.

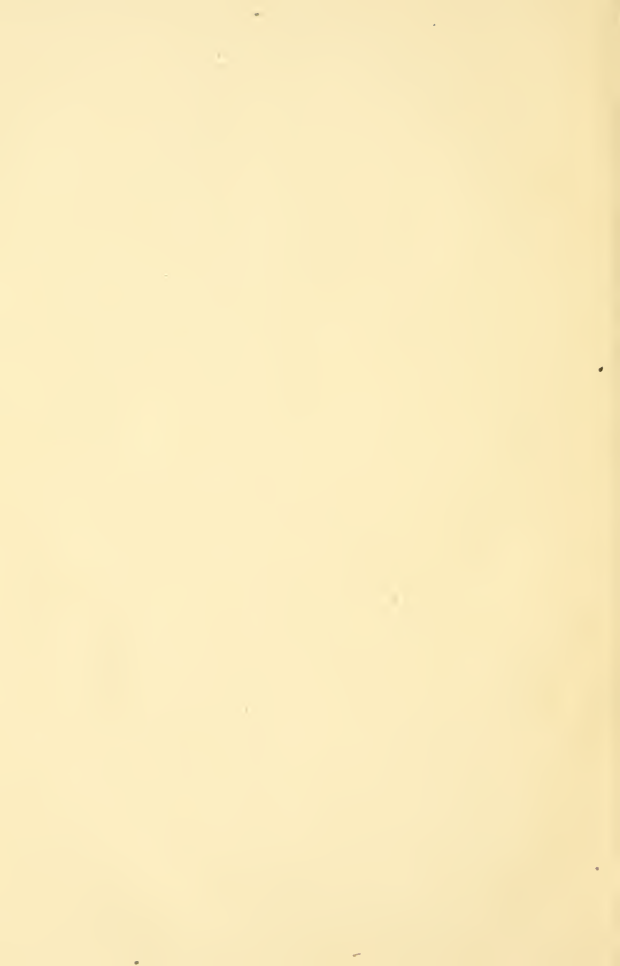
Moderator, brethren!—I have done. I have given you "my opinion,"—the opinion indeed of one of your humblest associates, yet worthy of respect if sustained by the law and the testimony. I respectfully invoke for it a candid examination. Permit me sir, in

fraternal respect to close with the appropriation of an apostle's admonitory language, used on a different occasion.—“Sirs, ye ought to have listened to your *Southern* brethren, and not have loosed the ship of the church from the anchorage in the constitution, and to have suffered this harm. For twenty years, we have been tossed about on this agitated sea, while no sun or stars of light appeared. And now you have brought the ship into a place where two seas meet—when, though no man may lose his ecclesiastical life, there is great danger of the loss of the ship. Beware of further agitation, lest by the violence of the waves, the vessel be broken, and we all find ourselves, some on planks, some on *broken pieces* of the vessel, trying to make our way to the shore.”

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